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- The role of the police in society

## The role of the police in society

**Last updated:** 11/1-2023

About Sweden – an orientation about Swedish society.

Print

This text is about the police and the role of the police in society. It describes how the police work, how you report a crime and how you can tip off the police.

It also describes what you have to do if you have been the victim of a crime and the reactions you may experience as a victim. It also describes what happens during a trial.

The right to life, liberty and personal safety

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and personal safety. Everyone is entitled to live a life without violence, crime and harassment. This means that children must not have to worry about violence within the family, for example, that no women should have to suffer sexual abuse, and that elderly people should not have to be afraid of robberies and burglaries.

Swedish society is safe for most people. But not always. Crime does occur in Sweden just as it does in all other countries. No-one in Sweden should be scared of reporting a crime to the police, however. And a person who is suspected of a crime should know that the courts require convincing evidence before anyone is sentenced.

Crime is not prevented by the police alone. Homes, schools, workplaces, sports clubs and old friends need to help out.

## Police in society

The role of the police is to help people and protect them from crime. This applies to people who live in Sweden as well as visitors to the country. Everyone, everywhere in Sweden should feel safe. People should feel safe in their homes, in the street, at school, in their workplace, and everywhere else. It is the task of the police to ensure that everyone in Sweden follows Swedish law. The police collaborate with schools, municipalities, businesses, associations, and government agencies to prevent crime and to make society safe.

The Swedish Police is also the government agency that issues passports and national ID cards to Swedish citizens. The police also grant certain permits, such as for protests. The Riksdag adopts the laws and regulations that govern police work, and the police have to comply with those laws and regulations.

Questions to think about

Public trust in the police is quite high in Sweden. Why do you think this is?

What is trust in the police like in the country where you lived previously?

## Police work

The Swedish Police exists to make it safe and secure to live and reside in Sweden. The police are there to help people and to stop crime. In the event of a crime, the police have to intervene. Sweden has both women and men as police officers, who do the same work.

Police work includes investigating and trying to solve crimes. The police do this by speaking to people who may know something about the crime in question. Sometimes you have to cooperate with the police. This may mean telling them what you have seen and what you know about something that has happened. In Sweden a person over the age of 15 may not refuse to give evidence, which means you have to tell the police if you know anything about a crime. The police will also seek information about the crime in other ways.

The police always try to solve problems by talking to people. But sometimes the police have to use force – and they are allowed to. It might be that the police need to protect people from a person who may be dangerous. Or the police may need to arrest someone who is suspected of a crime. Sometimes the police need to protect themselves. The Swedish Police is the only government agency in Sweden that is entitled to use force – but no more than is required to resolve the situation.

The police carry pepper spray, a truncheon (baton), a pistol and an electroshock weapon (also known as a Taser). Always step aside when the police ask you to. Do not try to stop the police if they are trying to arrest someone, for example. Doing so is a criminal offence. In Sweden, it is a criminal offence to try to influence police work or a government agency's decision by paying them money. This is known as bribery.

You are not allowed to try to solve a crime on your own. If you are subjected to violence, you have the right to protect yourself. You are not allowed to avenge a crime, such as if you think someone is causing you harm or doing something else criminal. Instead, you should contact the police. They will investigate what has happened, and then a court will decide if anyone is going to be sentenced for a crime and what their sentence will be.

### Police work with young people

The police work a lot with stopping young people from doing things which are criminal. For that reason, there are often police officers talking to young people in places where young people gather. Sometimes criminals want to use young people to sell drugs, for example. It is illegal to force a person to commit a criminal act. The police also collaborate with municipalities and sometimes visit schools so that children and young people can meet them and learn more about the work that the police do.

In Sweden, you can be held criminally responsible from the age of 15, which means that you can be sentenced if you commit a crime. If you are sentenced, this will be noted on your criminal record, which can affect your future possibilities. Having a criminal record may make it harder for you to get a job or a driving licence. It can also make it harder for you to get a permanent residence permit or citizenship. If you commit a serious crime, you may be deported from Sweden and banned from returning. If a child under the age of 15 commits a crime, it is the social services who decide what is going to happen to them.

### Reporting crime

It's important that you contact the police if you see a crime being committed or if someone does something to you which may be criminal. All crimes have to be reported to the police. You should report a crime as soon as you can. You are entitled to an interpreter when you are in contact with the police.

### Tip off the police

You can also contact the police if you are concerned about someone else. You might be worried, for instance, that someone is going to commit a crime against a person you know. The police need help in order to stop crimes, and tip-offs to the police are an important part of that. Contact the police if you see something suspicious or if you know that someone is doing something criminal. You do not have to tell the police who you are when you call.

### Contacting the police

**Call 114 14** if you want to report a crime that has happened. It might be violent crime, theft, or a burglary. It is important that you report the crime as soon as you can.

**Call 112** if it is an emergency and the police need to come straight away – for example, if you see someone being assaulted.

### Testifying

There has to be evidence of a crime in order for someone to be sentenced for it. Telling the police what you have seen can help them find the person who committed the crime. Witnesses who testify (or give evidence) to the court are important for it to be able to determine if someone is guilty of a crime.

If you have been subjected to crime

If you have been subjected to a crime, the police will want to speak to you in order to be able to solve the crime. You have to tell them what happened, and the police will ask you questions. This is known as questioning. You are allowed to take someone with you to police questioning. Sometimes it will be enough for you to speak to a police officer on the phone.

You are entitled to an interpreter in order for you and the police to understand each other. You are also entitled to medical care if you are injured and to have someone to talk to about what happened. The police will explain how you can get help. The police want to help you and listen to you. You don't need to be afraid or worried when you are in contact with the police.

## Trials and courts

When the police have investigated a crime, a prosecutor decides whether to hold a trial in a court of law. The court decides what sentence the suspect will receive or if the suspect is going to be acquitted (declared innocent of the crime). This decision depends on whether the police have found any evidence that the crime was committed by the suspect, and nothing else. Everyone is equal before the law.

If you are not happy with a judgement by the court, you can appeal it. Both the person subjected to the crime (the injured party) and the person sentenced for the crime (the defendant) can appeal. The document with the judgement includes information about how to appeal and by when you need to make your appeal. This document will be sent to you after the trial. You can also ask for the judgement document from your defence counsel or counsel for the injured party. The defence counsel is the person representing and defending a person who is accused of a crime.

## Counsel for the injured party

A counsel for the injured party is a solicitor (advokat) or a lawyer (jurist) who helps the crime victim during the investigation and the trial. Your counsel can represent you during the trial and help you in the matter of damages. Damages are financial compensation that you may be entitled to if you have been subjected to a crime.

For some crimes, such as sex-related crimes, you are always entitled to a counsel for the injured party. You may also be entitled to a counsel for other serious crimes such as robbery and assault. Tell the police if you want a counsel for the injured party. The city or district court determines whether you are entitled to one. In that case, there is no cost for you. If you have not been granted counsel for the injured party but you still want legal help, you have to contact a lawyer and pay for their services yourself.

## Reactions and emotions following a crime

Being subjected to a crime can stir up many emotions. You may be thinking a lot about what happened and about what you did and did not do when the crime occurred. You may feel angry, anxious, sad, or frightened, which are all natural reactions. It is also natural not to feel any negative emotions at all. No-one can tell you that what you are feeling is wrong, but it may be a good idea to talk to someone about what you are feeling.

You may also have feelings of guilt. But as a victim of the crime, you should not feel guilty about what happened. It is never your fault that you were subjected to a crime. The responsibility is entirely the perpetrator's.

## If you need to talk to someone

If you have been subjected to crime and you want to talk to someone, you can contact the Crime Victim Authority (Brottsoffermyndigheten) or Victim Support Sweden (Brottsofferjouren). This also applies to witnesses to a crime and family members. You can remain anonymous if you wish, and help is available in several different languages.

[Read more on the Crime Victim Authority's website about how they can help.](#)

[Read more on Victim Support Sweden's website about how they can help.](#)

There are several other organisations that provide counselling and help in connection with crimes. BRIS is specialised in helping children. If you are a woman and you have been subjected to threats or violence, you can contact the National Women's Helpline (Kvinnofridslinjen).

You can also always ask the police how to get in touch with someone to talk to.

[Read more on BRIS' website about how they can help.](#)

[Read more on the website of the National Women's Helpline about how they can help.](#)

## Questions to think about

Did you know that the Crime Victim Authority exists to protect the rights of crime victims and to draw attention to their needs and interests?

Interview with Pernilla, a police officer

Source: The Swedish Police

**What made you want to become a police officer?**

It is a profession where you get to meet people. There are different things you can work with as a police officer. You can work with traffic, for example, or with young people.

**What should a good police officer be like?**

A good police officer has to be kind, has to be able to talk to people, and want to help people.

**Do you use other languages than Swedish in your work?**

English sometimes. If I am speaking to a person who does not understand Swedish or English, I need an interpreter.

**What do you like about your work as a police officer?**

Helping people. And that every day is different. I like that.

**Is there anything you do not like?**

I have to do a lot of writing, after having questioned someone, for example, and that takes time. The writing work means I spend less time out on the streets.

**Tell us about a day on the job.**

We always work in pairs, and go together to traffic checkpoints, thefts in shops, assaults, and other things. I work during the day sometimes, and in the evenings or at night other times.

**Have you ever been scared on the job?**

Not scared, no, but stressed out if I know there are criminal people in front of me.

**What do you carry when you are working?**

A gun, pepper spray, handcuffs and a police radio. In the patrol car I have extra clothes, a helmet, writing materials, water, and a fruit.

**What can the police do to help people?**

We help people all the time. If there has been a traffic accident, we make sure the cars involved get towed away. If the occupants of the car have not been injured, we help them too, if we can, to get home or to work.

**Do you have any particular memory from your work that you would like to share with us?**

Yes, when we received an alarm about a burglary in a house and got there very quickly. The thieves were still there, so we could arrest them. That was good.

**What would you say to someone who is thinking about becoming a police officer?**

Become a police officer, and you will be able to help other people. It is a fun job with good collaboration.

**Is there anything else you would like to say?**

Call the police. We want people to call so that we can get to where we are needed.

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